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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 9361
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RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY
RUEHCV/AMEMBASSY CARACAS 9389
RUEHLP/AMEMBASSY LA PAZ OCT LIMA 5473
RUEHQT/AMEMBASSY QUITO 6074
RUEHGL/AMCONSUL GUAYAQUIL 4103
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 1500

C O N F I D E N T I A L BOGOTA 007238

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/09/2017
TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [KJUS](#) [CO](#)
SUBJECT: HUMAN RIGHTS CONCERNS IN CARTAGENA INVOLVE NEWLY
EMERGING CRIMINAL GROUPS

Classified By: Political Counselor John S. Creamer.
Reason: 1.4(b,d)

¶1. (U) Summary: Displaced community members told a visiting international delegation organized by UNHCHR that threats by newly emerging criminal bands are on the rise. A community leader was shot on July 16, and 15 other human rights and community leaders received threats this year. The local Human Rights Ombudsman (Defensoria) also reports increases in youth recruitment by criminal bands, extortion, and petty crime. The delegation urged the acting mayor to address security concerns by community leaders and to boost resources for the displaced. End summary.

¶2. (U) On October 1, Poloff visited Cartagena with a human rights delegation organized by the local United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNHCHR) office to meet with a displaced community and local officials. The delegation included the Swedish and Argentine Ambassadors, as well as diplomats from Spain, the United Kingdom, Switzerland, Canada and France. The local Human Rights Ombudsman (Defensoria) Jeannette Vargas told the delegation that threats via email or phone by new criminal groups to human rights leaders are increasing. There were seven homicides, largely involving turf battles between rival gangs, this year in Bazarro, an open air market in Cartagena, as well as several "night visits" by criminals pressuring indigenous leaders to cease their activity. Computers with valuable information on human rights cases were stolen from the local Defensoria's office on March 17.

¶3. (U) The UNHCHR said new emerging criminal bands, such as the Aguilas Negras, Los Paisas, Los Paracos and Grupo de los 40, threaten local residents. Residents and shopkeepers in Bazarro and the neighborhoods of Cerro la Popa, Pozon, and the Nelson Mandela displaced community are frequent targets of extortion, loan sharks, petty crime and the occasional homicide. Demobilized paramilitaries engage in territorial disputes and crime. Local police say they are detaining increasing numbers of youth recruited by new criminal bands and the FARC for as little as 400,000 pesos. Human rights groups doubt the security forces can protect them. At least 15 human rights defenders and community leaders received threats in 2007. Union leader Hernan de Jesus Rangel Lopez of SINTRAEECOL was beaten on June 29, and later sought and received police protection. Currently, 25 members of the community receive some sort of protection, such as a cell

phone or vehicle.

¶4. (C) The delegation also met with residents of the Nelson Mandela community, including the parents and brother of community leader Manuel Lopez, who was shot on July 16 while guarding a kindergarten. The parents thanked the UNHCHR and the Defensoria for their support, but complained police have no leads in the investigation of their son's death. Other leaders said police presence is inadequate, noting there are only 20 roving police officers for a community of approximately 45,000. Community members highlighted a surge in youth recruitment by criminal bands, faulted the government for not countering these groups, and complained the local Prosecutor General's Office (Fiscalia) is not responsive. The community urged the delegation to call international attention to their plight. The Defensoria said the security situation is complicated by rumors that some Nelson Mandela residents, as well as some Fiscalia officials, have ties to former paramilitary and new criminal groups.

¶5. (U) Acting mayor Felipe Merlano said Cartagena still faced post-conflict security challenges, but was relatively calm compared to other cities its size. High unemployment, new criminal groups and Cartagena's location as a drug corridor are key factors in this. He noted the difficulties of dealing with the flood of displaced people that arrived in Cartagena over the past five years but said the city will spend \$15 million in 2008 to provide the displaced with social, health and education programs. The city did not have sufficient police resources to protect the thousands of residents in the Nelson Mandela community but is trying to protect the leaders at most risk.
Brownfield